



*The City of New York
Borough of Queens*



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District Manager, Marie Adam-Ovide

Health Committee Meeting

Date: Monday, April 13, 2015
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Place: Community Board 8 Office
197-15 Hillside Avenue
Hollis, NY 11423

Seymour Schwartz, Health Committee Chair

Board Members: Susan Cleary, Allen Eisenstein, Mary Maggio Fischer, Florence Fisher, Kevin Forrestal, Tamara Osherov

Committee Members: Judith Guttman

Also in attendance: Jeff Gottlieb
Alma Karassavidis, Community Board 8 Staff

Seymour Schwartz called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. He noted that in addition to discussing the T-Building and Dunn’s visit that late today he found out the Health Department has made an inquiry of Community Board 8 and we will be discussing that too. Mr. Schwartz asked to hear first from the people who made the tour of the Dunn Development Projects.

Florence Fisher- I found the tour very interesting. I was impressed with the building that is being built near the Navy Yards. The building that we went into (*across from the NYCHA houses*) seemed to be very well run. There was nothing negative about the tour. He has a wonderful reputation and seems to be very up front and honest about what he wants to do. He has been doing this for a long time and has worked for Non-Profits.

Kevin Forrestal- He has worked for Non-Profits but his model is a For-Profit, doing work that a lot of Non-Profits do.

Susan Cleary – He announced that he is working with an architectural group known as SLCE. It is referenced in the last paragraph of my notes. I went online and checked it out. He said not to be put off by the huge projects. They have done a lot of high rises, but also Senior Housing. They look a lot like the Dunn buildings. The Dunn buildings are cookie cutter, in my opinion, but they

are nicely done. They are clean and try to incorporate some green space for the residents. I like that. The only one I didn't see green space for was the one next to the church. That had its own problems, it was a mud pit. It was a horrible piece of land that the church members, Dunn and his architects turned into supportive housing.

Kevin Forrestal- I agree with what was said before by the other members. With the previous proposal, it was in many ways discriminatory, people were being isolated. It wasn't integrated housing. This guy came and is doing what I said the other group should be doing. I haven't seen any history of a working relationship between Dunn and Communilife. This is the first time. I spoke to them also about what happens if the support organization and Dunn have problems. He said they never had that but in the event, they would have to deal with it. The only time they had any issue was when an organization had run into financial problems. They had to find another group. They showed us some nice things. They did a wonderful presentation, it was first class.

Florence Fisher- There is supposed to be 3 different types, HIV, homeless and the mentally ill.

Kevin Forrestal- No, they moved from that. All those people are in the group. They also spoke about people who are in situations where they have to walk up flights of stairs and they can't do that anymore in the hospital. They would be eligible for it. Physical disabilities would also be included. Anyone who has difficulty gaining housing, coming out of the hospital would be eligible to go there.

Mary Maggio Fischer - Special needs?

Kevin Forrestal – No, special needs have a different connotation. As you get older you don't want to up and down stairs. A friend of mine just had a stroke. If he can't go back to his home because he has to go up and down stairs, he would be eligible. There would not be just one group. Dunn has clearly indicated that he wants to do criminal background checks. I accept what he says because it makes sense. He is going to have to fill this building with paying people. He does not want a problem in his building. So he has as much interest as we do. I think that is a legitimate argument to make. He has won various awards and has done things with the Peace Corps. He has recently accepted lower profit rates for himself to do affordable building with de Blasio. He seems like a nice enough guy, but he is also making a decent profit. He is a businessman, but he also has a social agenda, which a lot of people have but some people don't. He is doing well, but also has grown very carefully.

Florence Fisher- He did say that if there are people that are not behaving he does evict. They keep a very close eye on the residents.

Susan Cleary- Dunn is a mensch. We are not so sure about Communilife. We are not so sure about integrating these 75 units, peppering them through the building.

Seymour Schwartz - There is a lot that is vague and generalized here. We should say that at the outset.

Kevin Forrestal – If you are dealing with special populations, the idea is to integrate them into the community. These are people who can function very well.

Susan Cleary - Like a group house.

Kevin Forrestal – Group apartments or individuals. He will be doing studios. My prediction is that all the studios are going to be in the same line because of the plumbing. That is how they are going to lay out the buildings.

Judith Guttman- I would like to ask a question of anyone here. I was unable to do the tour but I did go to the Bronx. I remember that the Communilife initial plan was 700 residents with one case worker. We talked about this at the big meeting at St. Nicholas Tolentine where Parkway Village sent 300 residents to express their concerns. I would like to know if any follow up was done with Communilife or anybody else associated with this project to find out the ratio if you are only having 75 people who may need services.

Susan Cleary – They did give a ratio of 7 to 1. They would then have to have to have 10 case workers or 10 social workers or RNs or PAs.

Kevin Forrestal – No. The ratio is going to be whatever the State of NY requires it to be at the time.

Seymour Schwartz – This is not necessarily good. I would like to sharpen the perspective and point out things that were not said as yet. Every one of the three locations are virtually brand new. One was incomplete. It was very impressive with brand new tile and painted walls. He is very clever in a number of ways besides marketing. The people who designed the interior are very professional in the use of materials, the way they designed the project. No question about it and it was very economically done. The apartments are postage stamp size. I could take two of those living rooms and put them in my living room. It is line with de Blasio's new scheme by reducing the number of square feet in order to create affordable housing. You are talking about people for whom this is a vast improvement over what they had. There was a young couple with a child in the 3-bedroom apartment. He pointed and said they came from those slums just a block away. For them it was a tremendous step forward and they are extremely happy. The other 2-bedroom apartment was furnished beautifully. When I asked who did this, she said her son did the decorating. I have a feeling that Dunn sampled this apartment and provided all those beautiful furnishings. We should not be swayed by some of that. When it comes to Red Hook, it seems to me that they violated the current policy of the City Administration which is not to be integrated housing. He said he was told by City Housing to put affordable housing in a separate building. That was sort of contrary to the whole concept. One important thing he said is that these people will be vetted. He certainly does not want drug addicts, sex offenders, etc. He also said that the law at this point does not allow setting aside housing for veterans. That's an interesting point.

Kevin Forrestal - The protocols and the regulations; there is no law, regulation is not a law.

Seymour Schwartz - Yes, the point is it leaves the question in limbo.

Kevin Forrestal - Yes it does but he said he felt confident that they could work this out.

Florence Fisher - He said that they could make housing for veterans?

Seymour Schwartz - It sounded as if he can get around to it. But he was absolutely adamant about the question of union labor.

Kevin Forrestal – Rory Lancman told me the night before that the union organizations have agreed to not object to having non-union labor. I was floored.

Seymour Schwartz– I would be surprised if they would agree to that.

Judith Guttman – I got a call from Masiss who told me it was being worked out between the union. He didn't say what.

Seymour Schwartz – In an interview for The Chronicle a few weeks back, Rory was begging the question on that.

Kevin Forrestal - Whatever it is, it is, we have taken our stand on that and it has to be worked out.

Seymour Schwartz - It is unfinished business. He said that we could have use of the Community Room that they have for the residents. It is kind of small and seats about 20 people or so. My own opinion is that we would be missing the boat if we didn't work for the 8,000 SF Community Room. CB8 doesn't have anything like that. A community center would make a tremendous contribution to the community. I don't know how it would work out. I could envision it being a senior center in the morning until after lunch. In the afternoon, maybe a youth center for basketball or a gym, and perhaps a meeting hall in the evening; even for the Community Board. He indicated a little hesitantly, that he would help us in seeking financial support. We do need his know how. If we are to move forward, the question is who among us would take on the responsibility?

Susan Cleary volunteered by raising her hand.

Seymour Schwartz – We will discuss it further. Now we have a volunteer who is prepared to carry this (the concept of a community center). To make the point very strongly, this is something we should pursue with our legislators and find the answer on money. We have the place if we want it, we need the money and we need our legislators on our side.

Kevin Forrestal – I believe that Alvin said he really didn't want to go into discussions as to what that should be until we go back and determine what it is.

Seymour Schwartz - Yes, that's alright. The point is to get the use of the square feet Dunn will be setting aside.

Kevin Forrestal - The square feet is there but what is it going to be used for. We said we wanted it free. If it is for something like a community center it should be free.

Susan Cleary – Who is going to pay for the telephone and gas bills?

Seymour Schwartz – That is the thing I should have added. We insist that it should be free.

Kevin Forrestal – Unless we bring somebody else in that normally would get funds to pay for rent, for example a daycare; then it doesn't make sense to be free. It depends on what the use is.

Seymour Schwartz – I am going to push for a community center. I will go before the board and explain why I think it's the best bet for 8,000 SF in the CB8 area.

Kevin Forrestal – Then the question is who is going to pay for the salaries, etc.

Seymour Schwartz –We will talk at a later date about the money.

Susan Cleary – Somebody has to pay for the gas, electric, heat, WiFi, phone, etc. It's not going to be totally free.

Seymour Schwartz - An excellent precedent is the Kew Gardens Community House. The best example of how to use a community center.

Kevin Forrestal - Nothing is free, it receives funding.

Chairman Schwartz opened the meeting for discussion, including those who did not experience the Dunn Development Projects Tour.

Mary Maggio Fischer – Kevin you tapped on special needs and people who don't have access into their current housing. To me, psych, homeless, HIV is already a special needs individual. If you can define what other special needs they mean.

Kevin Forrestal – It does not require special needs. It requires special “housing” needs.

Mary Maggio Fischer - Under the Cuomo Administration they are trying to move them out of nursing home facilities. How is it determined who is a high cost Medicaid user? My question is HOW is it determined? Is it repeated hospital visits, or if you have a patient like my daughter, that is on expensive medications. She may be considered a high Medicaid abuser. How do you determine who is a high Medicaid abuser that needs housing? You have to differentiate. Is it a person that is using an ER for 3 hots and a cot or a person who has to take medication their whole life. There are different ways society may label a Medicaid abuser. A person taking meds for their life to sustain themselves is not an abuser in my opinion. We need clarification on that.

Seymour Schwartz - Who do you think should/will determine that?

Kevin Forrestal - We need to get clarification on that. There are several things listed, but one is you need to have a housing need. You can be a high Medicaid user and not have housing needs. There are some Medicaid regulations that talk about that, that would then go to the care management programs where they would be eligible.

Seymour Schwartz - We talk about a preference for Queens residents. My understanding is that people who use the facility of Queens Hospital are not necessarily residents of Queens.

Mary Maggio Fischer - It does not say Queens here, it says HHC, that could be anywhere from the Bronx to Brooklyn.

Kevin Forrestal - There are two groups, the 75 and everybody else. The 75 are HHC, the vast majority are Brooklyn or Queens. There is actually more SE Queens.

Mary Maggio Fischer - If you have 20 applicants from Brooklyn and you have 40 applicants with only X-amount of seats, who do you give preference to?

Seymour Schwartz – The question of preference should be raised.

Kevin Forrestal - The thing that got most of us concerned/upset from the first time is the group of 75 people. Concerns were about what do they look like and how can we make sure that they are safe. I think there should be some discussion of making sure there is a mixture of different kind of folks in there. They are not all one category of people. They have a variety of health issues, a mix of different people.

Allen Eisenstein – I will pass right now, just listening to all this information.

Tammy Oshero – I have a question about the studios being in line. They are supposed to be peppered throughout the whole property. It should be all spread out. I do understand for the plumbing.

Seymour Schwartz - Even if it is that way, on each floor you will have a variety. Even the highest rental properties work that way.

Tammy Oshero – On one floor, OK now I got it. That makes sense, thanks.

Chairman Schwartz invited Jeff Gottlieb to add to the discussion.

Jeff Gottlieb – In my discussions with the Building Trades Council, it was pretty clear that they were opposed to non-union labor. Rory may have had discussions with others, perhaps with the central labor council president. In my discussions with the community affairs person, they are pretty well set on not having (*in this publicly funded building*) non-union labor. So we have to clear that up. My major concern is the intermixing of the 131 and 75. I am sure that they will have very good medical facilities on hand. I do not want to see incidents occur. The private security by Dunn Associates will eliminate any problems. My concern is the interaction between schizophrenics, depressives and the like and the affordable housing residents who are struggling

to make ends meet. I am sure they would not want to have any confrontations to occur with these people. From what I understand there will be elderly, disabled as well and seems like it will be a good mix. We want to make sure that the affordable housing people are given a chance to live a peaceful life.

Seymour Schwartz - How do you do that? Can you guarantee that in market rate housing? Even in market rate housing you can't be assured of who your neighbor is.

Kevin Forrestal - One of the things said by Dunn is that it is not just the affordable but also the middle income people. He needs to fill those apartments and keep them. He is going to be very motivated to make sure it works. There is no guarantee. We all know that something could happen. He will take certain steps to make sure there are certain things in the person's past that would raise red flags. No sex offenders, felons, etc. Anybody could go berserk tomorrow.

Seymour Schwartz - Queens Hospital has a responsibility as to who they put in there based on medical records.

Kevin Forrestal - There are 3 levels and you can be reasonably assured that every effort will be taken. You can't have a guarantee. It is very possible that the affordable housing or the middle income housing person's child may assault the supportive people. Mental illness does not discriminate.

Mary Maggio Fischer - When we met with him here, my question was how can you evict when I can't evict? The answer was I could remove a special needs and replace with a special needs. Unlike outside, I am going to evict somebody with an emotional problem and get someone else. So because he is replacing a special needs and evicting a special needs, it is not a discriminatory action and the courts will wash it and let him walk away.

Kevin Forrestal - If you asked a few months ago, I would suggest that we try to get the 75 number down. I would not suggest that now because that would reduce the amount of security in the building. Right now you have 2 security doormen 24/7.

Susan Cleary - Currently the City has still not signed off on affordable housing for Veterans. I found this article about Veterans and PTSD. It is about Veterans who are working out the things they can't talk about through the use of painting masks to bring out all the hurt that's inside them. I think that in our community center we should have a place for them. If we can't give them affordable housing, then we can give them an art studio within the community center.

Judith Guttman - I live the closest to the T-Building and I appreciate the concerns about the 75 people. I trust Mr. Dunn; he seems to be an upstanding citizen. I am not so sure about Communilife. We went and visited the Bronx facility that Senator Avella arranged for us to tour a couple of summers ago. They had a lot of hands-on supervision of their population. They also had some facilities sprinkled around the City; mostly in Brooklyn where the maximum number of special needs people were about 50. At this time they were talking about the 700 so it was a different project. I am just a little bit nervous about trusting them. I am not so nervous about Mr. Dunn or the Community Board.

Seymour Schwartz - Could we pose a question as to the role of Communilife? We would like more information on what they are responsible for.

Susan Cleary - We would like transparency.

Judith Guttman - On all the levels of the project. We have gotten those answers from Dunn.

Florence Fisher - Can we have them at our next meeting to explain it?

Seymour Schwartz - Why don't we request that? We would like to hear from Communilife directly as well as a representative from the Dunn Organization.

Jeff Gottlieb – Wasn't the former president of HHC now the head of Communilife?

Kevin Forrestal - No, it was actually Chairman of the Board.

Florence Fisher – Most of their facilities are in Manhattan.

Judith Guttman - The Queens Preservation Council and other preservation organizations had applied for landmark designation for the building and the LPC declined, not on the quality of the building, but they stated that the covenant was protected.

Seymour Schwartz - The outside of the building is filthy and they do not intend to touch it. They are not talking about external repairs of any kind unless they are absolutely necessary. That's a big difference with gutting the building and doing the inside. They will do only what they need to do.

Allen Eisenstein – In looking at this monthly rent chart, the rent is like one third of their income. That is very high.

Chairman Schwartz proposed that a copy of Susan Cleary's summary together with the meeting minutes and our follow up requests be distributed to all board members at Wednesday's meeting. It is noted that Susan Cleary volunteered to follow through with whatever we intend to do with the community facility.

Seymour Schwartz - Late this afternoon I was made aware of a communication from the NYS Department of Health. They want to know what are the five most important health concerns in our Community Board. Marie was helpful in pointing out five concerns that came to her mind. Let's open the discussion for these concerns.

Florence Fisher – We need another hospital

Mary Maggio Fischer – That's not happening. They are moving beds out of hospitals. I say substance abuse.

Susan Cleary - How about not closing any more hospitals in CB8?

Kevin Forrestal – I would put mental health and substance abuse together.

Mary Maggio Fischer – We have no hospice care in this community.

Kevin Forrestal – Access to primary care.

Chairman Schwartz re-iterated what was decided as the five most important health concerns for CB8:

- Hospital Beds
- Interventional Cardiac/Stroke care
- Mental Health/ Substance Abuse
- Hospice Care
- Access to Primary Care

These reports will be issued to the Board Members. Should they want to respond at our monthly meeting, it will be up to the Chair.

The meeting adjourned at 8:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alma Karassavidis, Community Board 8 Staff

April 15, 2015